



Wyoming Department of Education

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MEMORANDUM NO. 2013-032

TO: School District Superintendents
Special Education Directors

FROM: Joanne Whitson
Wyoming Deaf-Blind Project

DATE: March 25, 2013

SUBJECT: Wyoming Deaf-Blind Project Announces Project SASI

ADDRESSING THE PERSONNEL SHORTAGE OF RURAL, REMOTE AND HIGH-NEED AREAS

The Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) is aware of the frustrations districts face in trying to obtain qualified personnel to work alongside students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Sensory Impairments.

Therefore, the WDE Deaf-Blind Project has entered into a long-term partnership with the second cohort of Texas Tech University's Virginia Murray Sowell Center for Research and Education in Visual Impairments to offer highly-qualified teachers in Wyoming an opportunity to receive an endorsement in Autism Spectrum Disorders and Sensory Impairments through distance education.

The focus of this grant is to assist districts with the growing demand of providing highly qualified teachers in the areas of sensory impairments and autism. Each applicant will need to choose a field of focus:

- Teacher for the Visually Impaired
- Orientation & Mobility Instructor
- Deaf-Blind Educator
- Teacher for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing

Regardless of what field the applicant chooses, each program completer will also earn his/her certification in Autism Spectrum Disorders.

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Eligibility criteria requires that the applicant has a teaching degree and meet the standards of NCLB definition §9101 “Highly Qualified” <http://nichcy.org/schools-administrators/hqt/nclb>.

There are limited slots, so prospective students should submit their applications early. This is an on-line program that will take approximately 2.5 years to complete. Courses, books, and materials are covered by the grant. In addition, depending on which field of study, there is some time on campus during weekends and in the summer. The grant covers travel and accommodations.

If teachers in your district are interested in participating in this grant opportunity, please complete the attached paperwork and send it via email to Joanne Whitson, Wyoming Deaf-Blind Project Director joanne.whitson@wyo.gov. Please mail the hard copies to the following address:

Joanne Whitson, Deaf-Blind Project Director
215 West Buffalo, Room 325
Rawlins, WY 82301

If you have any questions, please call Joanne Whitson at 307-324-5333.
The deadline for applications is July 1, 2013

Project S.A.S.I.: Students with Autism and Sensory Impairments Addressing the Personnel Shortages of Rural, Remote, and High-Need Areas

Dr. Nora Griffin-Shirley, Dr. Rona Pogrund, and Dr. Roseanna Davidson



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

Through a \$1.25million competitive grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education, Texas Tech University is embarking on a 5-year effort to combat the critical shortage of qualified special education teachers professionally trained in the areas of visual impairment (VI), deafness and hard of hearing (D/HH), deafblindness (DB), and orientation and mobility (O&M), across the United States in rural and remote areas. This project employs a unique focus on training scholars in the characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and appropriate intervention for children with ASD who also have sensory impairments. Texas Tech University is playing a vital role in the success of students with ASD and sensory impairments across the nation.

Program Objectives:

- Identify, recruit, and train professionals in remote, and high-need locations to increase the capacity to serve students with sensory impairments from birth through secondary transition.
- Provide specialized training in effective strategies for working with students with sensory impairments and autism spectrum disorder. Scholars will receive a graduate certificate in sensory impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Provide a high quality personnel preparation program to scholars via a hybrid program that utilizes distance education, face-to-face instruction, and local support with outcomes that scholars will become trained professionals with expertise in one area of sensory impairment.
- By the end of the project, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Texas Tech University and the State Departments of Education for each of the six collaborating states will be established to maintain this collaborative partnership beyond the grant period.

Introduction

Project SASI, Students with Autism and Sensory Impairments, proposes to alleviate the need for professionals trained in the areas of visual impairment (VI), deafness and hard of hearing (D/HH), deafblindness (DB), and orientation and mobility (O&M), as well as professionals with expertise in the dual diagnosis of Autism and sensory impairments in rural, remote, and high-need areas in the states of Arkansas, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, Texas and Wyoming. This project includes a unique focus on students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) who also have sensory impairments because the prevalence of students with ASD is on the rise. With proper training in the characteristics of an appropriate intervention for children with ASD, as well as children with sensory impairments, professionals will be skilled to meet the unique needs of these learners.

Project S.A.S.I.



Students with Autism and Sensory Impairments:
Addressing the Personnel Shortages of Rural, Remote, and High-Need Areas



Method

- Via State collaborative partners, recruit 40 scholars for two cohorts.
- Books and materials are paid for by Project SASI
- Courses are offered via web-based course instruction via Blackboard including a variety of distance education technology such as audio and video podcasts, chat rooms, threaded discussions, email, YouTube clips, etc.
- Establish a dedicated SASI scholar online support group to support one another because of the long distances between them.
- Face-to-Face component connects the scholars who may feel disconnected through a distance education-only model and enriches the scholars' learning experience.
- Cycle of Reflective Analysis of Student Work through development of a training video via collaboration with Granite State College in New Hampshire will be employed during the internship phase as a model to assess scholar effectiveness based on student outcomes in special education.
- Establish collaborative partners (CP) and develop a mentor program where the CP's and local mentors will receive training from an established Mentor Program at The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to provide mentorship in order to insure that local children with ASD and sensory impairments are served.

Conclusion:

- Project SASI, in its first six months, has successfully moved forward in meeting its objectives.
- First cohort of 20 scholars began classes in January, 2012.
- There are scholars from each of the six targeted states and students in all four of the target programs: VI, D/HH, DB, and O&M.